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**Sent:** 11/29/2019 4:38:10 PM  
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**Subject:** Evacuation Lifted

[https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/explosion-fire-burning-at-port-neches-plant-early-wednesday/502-de236827-a796-48f7-ac55-fad5064c3c8b?Fb1010a=&fbclid=IwAR1R\\_DL1k7Og3sO6K5squU-tV3tQkKqgZ19oVGU3jiEBA6bdT-CYIjjJ2cE&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=PORT%20NECHES%20UPDATE%20Evacuation%20order%20lifted%20fire%20is%20contained&utm\\_content=PORT%20NECHES%20UPDATE%20Evacuation%20order%20lifted%20fire%20is%20contained+CID\\_378abb24b171f09a6519b66b501c5824&utm\\_source=tegna%20email%20newsletter&utm\\_term=READ%20MORE%20%20WATCH%20LIVE%20PRESS%20CONFERENCE](https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/explosion-fire-burning-at-port-neches-plant-early-wednesday/502-de236827-a796-48f7-ac55-fad5064c3c8b?Fb1010a=&fbclid=IwAR1R_DL1k7Og3sO6K5squU-tV3tQkKqgZ19oVGU3jiEBA6bdT-CYIjjJ2cE&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PORT%20NECHES%20UPDATE%20Evacuation%20order%20lifted%20fire%20is%20contained&utm_content=PORT%20NECHES%20UPDATE%20Evacuation%20order%20lifted%20fire%20is%20contained+CID_378abb24b171f09a6519b66b501c5824&utm_source=tegna%20email%20newsletter&utm_term=READ%20MORE%20%20WATCH%20LIVE%20PRESS%20CONFERENCE)

## Update on Port Neches plant fire | Fire contained, evacuations lifted

Author: KBMT

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PORT NECHES, Texas — Jefferson County officials have lifted a mandatory evacuation order that sent about 50,000 Mid-County residents fleeing the afternoon before Thanksgiving.

The announcement was made during a news conference at Port Neches City Hall Friday morning after officials met and decided conditions had improved enough not allow residents back into the area.

Officials noted that some streets near the scene of the fire would remain closed.

A FAA flight restriction is in effect around the area of the fire which means no drone flights are allowed in the area according to Branick.

Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick announced that the fire is now contained at the news conference.

Residents returning home should survey their property and be on the lookout for debris that may have been blown there during the explosions Branick said.

There was some asbestos installed at the plant and one of the compromised vessels could some of it could have been blown into surrounding neighborhoods he said.

Branick urged caution and asked residents to watch for metallic debris in their yards.

Port Neches Mayor Glenn Johnson spoke at the news conference and thanked TPC for keeping officials in the loop and being transparent during the incident.

Groves Mayor Brad Bailey praised the "extraordinary job" that local fire departments have done during the fire.

No major security incidents have been reported during the incident Nederland's Mayor Don Albanese said and praised officers saying they did their job.

Port Arthur Mayor Thurman Bartie also spoke and noted that in this part of Texas we work together as he spoke of cooperation among the South Jefferson County cities.

Bartie said that a concern in Port Arthur is air quality and that currently TCEQ reports that the air is ok but if conditions change residents will be notified.

Jefferson County Emergency Management officials met Friday morning near the TPC Plant in Port Neches to get a better assessment of the ongoing chemical fire and make a decision about a mandatory evacuation.

"I can confirm conditions are improving, but we are not out of the woods," Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick said Thursday. "I will not lift the evacuation order until I believe it is safe for citizens to return."

County officials ordered the evacuation for tens of thousands of people within a 4-mile radius around the scene of the fire on Wednesday after a second large explosion. It includes Port Neches, Groves, Nederland and part of Port Arthur.

#### **MAP | [View larger version of evacuation zone map](#)**

Branick says that there are still three areas of concern at the plant, describing them as blocks 5, 9 and 10.

He said block 5 is the spherical tank farm where, during Wednesday afternoon's explosion, a column could be seen taking off like a rocket.

The column landed between block 5 and 10.

Branick crews worked Thursday to clear debris between the blocks to allow a remote control water canons access to block 10 and a processing unit.

"In a pressurized gas fire you don't want to extinguish the flame. You want to keep it cool by shooting water above it and allowing the water vapor to fall. If you put it out and it's under pressure and encounters another ignition source, it can backfire and have an explosive effect. And we don't want any more explosions."

TPC Group employees have been shutting off valves at the plant to block lines that are still releasing chemicals, Port Neches Police Chief Paul Lemoine said in a [Facebook post](#) Thursday.

Once all valves are located and shut down, firefighters will allow the fire to burn itself out.

Branick addressed social media comments circulating about why officials are not using foam to fight the fire. Many in Texas remember foam was used to contain the ITC Tank Farm Fire in Deer Park in March.

Foam is appropriate for ponding fires, but not on a multi-sided object Branick explained.

"Foam is appropriate for ponding fires, for instance, if you had a hazardous substance burning on top of a pond. Foam would be appropriate in that instance, it's a one-dimensional object. But on a three-dimensional structure, it's not appropriate, particularly on structures that are hot because the foam would just go off of it," Branick said.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

After more than 50 air quality samples were taken following Wednesday's explosion at the TPC Plant, only trace amounts of *volatile organic compounds* (VOC) were detected at two different locations in Port Arthur.

TCEQ says there were no returns for the chemicals Butadiene or Benzene.

20 air monitoring stations were deployed at various locations in Port Neches and Port Arthur.

TCEQ says 0.05 ppm of VOC was detected at 2:33 p.m. Wednesday at 2875 Jimmy Johnson Blvd.

0.25 ppm of VOC was detected at 3:03 p.m. at H O Mills Blvd. north of Shreveport Blvd.

These levels are within federal and state guidelines, Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick said during a news conference Wednesday night.

"Short-term exposure to high concentrations of VOCs can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation, shortness of breath, headaches, and nausea," TCEQ said. "If you experience these health effects, leave the area until the situation has resolved."

## **CAUSE OF EXPLOSION**

The exact cause of the explosion is still unknown. TPC says they will form an investigation team to determine what happened once the ongoing fire is under control.

TPC officials know that at least three tanks have been damaged by the blaze, but firefighters have not been able to fully assess damage at the plant as they remain in a defensive position, Troy Monk, TPC's director of health, safety and security said.

Three workers were injured early Wednesday in the initial explosion that also blew out the windows and doors of nearby homes.

Firefighters worked to contain a blaze that erupted after the blast at the TPC Group plant and sent a large plume of smoke stretching for miles.

The three workers who were injured during the blast —two TPC employees and a contractor — have been treated and released from hospitals in Port Arthur and Houston, said Monk.

About 30 employees were working at the plant at the time of the explosion and all have been accounted for, according to TPC.

Monk said the blast occurred in an area of the plant that makes butadiene, a chemical used in the manufacture of synthetic rubber and other products. Branick, however, said on Thursday that butadiene was housed in a different part of the plant and that the only butadiene that was part of the explosion likely burned off.

Hours after the explosion, clean up began around Port Neches as residents and business owners picked up glass and boarded up windows that were smashed all over town. During that cleanup, a second powerful blast rocked those same neighborhoods.

12News crews roughly a mile from the plant could feel the explosion.